

NEW ARCHIVAL DISCOVERIES OF DOCUMENTS CONCERNING THE EMPIRE OF TREBIZOND

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Özet

Trabzon Rum İmparatorluğu ile İlgili Tespit Edilen Yeni Arşiv Belgeleri

Bu makale, Trabzon Rum İmparatorluğu (1204-1461) hakkında yeni verileri, İtalyan arşivlelerinden çıkan materyaller ışığında analiz etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Trabzon Rum İmparatorluğu, İtalya, arşiv.

Abstract

This article analyzes new data on the history of the Empire of Trebizond (1204-1461), mostly from Italian archives.

Key Words: Empire of Trebizond, Italy, archive.

There is not too much to add to the already discovered and well-explored corpus of Greek sources covering the history of the Empire of Trebizond. The late Greek erudite O. Lampsides was one of the last productive contributors. The still existing monuments of the Pontic area were fully described and analyzed by A. Bryer and D. Winfield¹. Oriental sources add some more material and of late they were well

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¹ A. Bryer, D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*. Washington, 1985. T.1-2. [Dumbarton Oaks Studies, XX]; A. Bryer, D. Winfield, S. Ballance, J. Isaac, *The Post-Byzantine Monuments of the Pontos*, Aldershot, 2002.

explored by R. Shukurov². A general state of research on Trebizond is being permanently done in extensive analytical bibliographies by A. Savvides³. I am glad that the history of the Empire of Trebizond is being explored now by our Turkish colleagues⁴. Of course, we can find here and there some new extraordinary discoveries. One of them was done in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. I mean a Florentine marriage chest of the artel (*bottega*) of Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Bono, made in 1463-65 for Palazzo Strozzi. It has a front picture of the capture of Trebizond by the Ottomans in 1461 with an imaginary scene of the battle and of the fortress of Trebizond and a realistic map image of Anatolia, from Constantinople down to Trebizond. It is a sign of the remarkable interest in the West to the fate of the last Byzantine Empire, an unprecedented ally of the failed Crusade against the Ottomans. It is scarcely known, notwithstanding some valuable publications⁵.

Among the precious donations to the Russian tsar Alexej Mihailovich in the mid XVIIth century made by the milieu of the Patriarchs of Constantinople my colleague Vera Chenzova detected a miraculous icon of Theotokos Vlacherniotissa from the famous monastery Theoskepastos near Trebizond (now it is in the Uspenskij – Dormition Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin). Besides the icon, donations included the illuminated Psalter of the XIIIth-XIVth centuries from the Library of Alexios III Grand Comnenos, bought from the seraglio of the sultans, where it was kept, probably, together

² R.M. Shukurov, *Velikie Komniny i Vostok (1204-1461)*, St. Petersburg, 2001.

³ A.G.K. Savvides, ST. Lampakis, *Γενική βιβλιογραφία του Βυζαντινού Πόντου και του κράτους των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας*, Athena, 1992. Additions: Αρχαίον Πόντου 45, 1994, pp.79-91; 47, 1996-97, pp.345-350; 48, 1998-99, pp. 232-250 and others.

⁴ *Trabzon Tarihi İlmî Toplantısı*, Trabzon, 1999; İbrahim Tellioğlu. *Osmanlı Hakimiyetine Kadar Doğu Karadeniz'de Türkler*, Trabzon, 2004; Mehmet Bilgin, *Doğu Karadeniz*, Trabzon, 2000.

⁵ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Kennedy Fund, 1913, 14.39. Cf.: W.R.V. A Florentine cassone, in: *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 9, 1914, pp. 145-147; H.I. Wehle, *A Catalogue of Italian, Spanish and Byzantine Paintings*, NY 1940, pp. 394; E. Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, Oxford, 1974, pp. 48-51, 63-64; A. Paribeni, Iconografia, committenza, topografia di Costantinopoli sul cassone di Apollonio di Giovanni con la "Conquista di Trebisonda", in: *Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e storia dell'arte*, 56, 2001, pp. 255-304; A reinterpretation of the scene as the Ankara (1402) battle is, to my mind, not very convincing: P. Lurati, Il Trionfo di Tamerlano. Una nuova lettura iconografica di un cassone del MetropolitanMuseum of Art, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 49, N 1/2, 2005, pp.101-118.

with other goods of the last emperor of Trebizond David confiscated by Mehmed II after the execution of the Trebizond royal family in 1463. Among other relics donated to the tsar are mentioned: the head of St. Eugene and a part of the right hand of St. Eustratios, two martyrs from Arauraka⁶.

Seals and coins may also bring some surprising discoveries. In 1963 in Trebizond was found a bull with the image of a *strategos* in the peaked helmet leaded by hand by St. George⁷. There are two inscriptions: 'Αλέξιος 'ο Κομνηνός and 'Ο 'Α(γιος) Γεώργιος. On the obverse there is a scene of Η ΗΑΓΙΑ ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ with the corresponding inscription. It is more typical for the seals of archpriests⁸. The seal was an object of Mr.Gounarides' article⁹. He did not however interpret the significance of the images that surely appeared not by chance and reflect some memorable and/or significant for the owner events. I proposed that the military campaign of 1204 and the capture of Trebizond by Alexios I Grand Comnenos are reflected there: St George invites the victorious prince to enter the city or fortress, opening the gates by his left hand. From the text of the Chronicle of Michael Panaretos we know that this most fabulous deed of Alexios took place in April, 6712 (1204)¹⁰ In 1204 Easter- the date of Anatasias- was in April, 25, while the memorial date of St. George – in April, 23. So I dared to assume that the seal points out the date of the capture of Trebizond, with St. George's

⁶ V.G. Chenzova, Ierusalimskij protosinlell Gavriil i ego okruzhenie: materialy k izucheniyu grecheskikh gramot ob ikone Vlahernskoi Bogomateri, in: *Palaeoslavica*, XV/1, 2007, pp. 57-13 6; EADEM, "Vizantijskoe nasledie" iz Trapezunda? K interpretazii neskol'kih izvestij o translatio reliquiae s Khristianskogo Vostoka v Moskvu v XVII v., in: *Rus' i Vizantija. Tezisy dokladov XVIII Vserossijskoi nauchnoi sessii vizantinistov. Moskva 20-21 oktyabrya 2008 g.*, Moscow, 2008, pp. 154-158.

⁷ A.Millas, Σταυροφορίες, in: *Η Καθημερινή Κυριακή*, 1/XI 1998, p.21. Spink. Auction 127. Byzantine Seals from the collection of George Zacos, Part 1. London, Wednesday, 7 October 1998 N 93. pp.48-49.

⁸ Compare: N.P. Likhachev, *Molivdovuly grecheskogo Vostoka*, ed. V.S. Shandrovskaia, Moscow 1991, pp. 172-173, tabl. LXIX, N 134; Spink. Auction 132. Byzantine Seals from the collection of George Zacos, Part 2. London, Tuesday 25 May 1999. N x145-x147, pp.20-21.

⁹ P. Gunarides, "Ένα μολυβδόβουλο του Αλεξίου Α' Μεγαλοκομνηνού, in: *Σύμμεικτα*, 13, 1999, pp.247-261.

¹⁰ *Μιχαήλ τοῦ Παναρέτου, Περί τῶν Μεγάλων Κομνηνῶν*, εκδ. Ο. Lampsides, in: *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 22, 1958, pp. 61.4-5.

warship in April 23 1204 and the proclamation of the emperor in April 25¹¹.

In addition we have some “findings” that may seem probable misinterpretations or even forgeries. One example is the story of the silver concave coins attributed to Andronikos I Guidon and recently sold at various numismatic auctions¹². A.L. Ponomarev’s research had proved that due to the stamps’ analysis they do not resemble coinage of Trebizond, but are antiquarian fakes.¹³

Beyond those (and many others, probably) marginal disclosures, we still have two main big source reserves – records of Italian archives and oriental documentation, defters first of all. The last ones were partly investigated by H.Lowry, N.Beldiceanu, H.Inalcik, P.S. Năştural and some other scholars, but the researchers mostly referred to the earliest defters¹⁴. I am not an orientalist and I’ll limit myself to the north Italian archives.

Calculating all revealed (available or cited in other documents) Venetian and Genoese notarial records drafted in the Black Sea area (there are not so many among thousands of acts) I can outline the following statistics:

PLACE	GENOESE		VENETIAN ACTS	
	ACTS	ACTS	ACTS	ACTS
	N of notaries	N of documents	N of notaries	N of documents
ARZERON	1	1		
ARZINGA	1	2		
VATIZA	1	4		
CAFFA	205	1508	7	8

¹¹ S.P.Karpov, *The Black Sea Region, before and after the Fourth Crusade*, in: *Urbs capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences; La IVe Croisade et ses consequences*, Paris, 2005, pp. 288-289; idem, *Istoriya Trapezundskoi imperii*, St Petersburg, 2007, pp. 108-110.

¹² S.Bendall, Andronicus I of Trebizond, in: *Numismatic Circular* LXXXVIII, 1980, pp. 400-401; idem, An early Coinage of the Empire of Trebizond?, in: *Numismatic Circular* 2002, pp. 113-115; idem, A Further Note on a Possible Early Coinage of the Empire of Trebizond, in: *Numismatic Circular* 2006. August, pp.207-210; Vente publique 94. 15 dec. 2007. Jean Elsen. Bruxelles, 2007. N 923.

¹³ A.L. Ponomarev, *Evoluzija denezhnykh sistem Prichernomorya i Balkan v XIII-XV vv.*, Moscow 2011, pp. 389-394.

¹⁴ References are made in my: *Istoriya*, pp. 23-24, note 164-165.

Documents Concerning the Empire of Trebizond

KILIA, LICOSTOMO	12	237		
HERAKLEIA PONTICA			1	1
PORTO PISANO			1	1
SEBASTEIA	3	5		
SEVASTOPOLIS/SUHUM	2	2		
DO CASTELLI			1	2
AMASTRIS	2	4		
AMISOS	3	29		
SARAY	1	1		
SUGDAIA	3	5		
SOLHAT	2	7		
TEBRIZ	4	7	1	1
TANA	14	13	34	1194
TREBIZOND	19	53	7	40
URGENJ				1
HADJITARKHAN			1	2
CEMBALO	2	3	1	6
Plain sea			1	1
TOTAL	273	1880	48	1257

No wonder we trace main places of interest for the Genoese – their main bulwark Caffa, for the Venetians – Tana, while Trebizond and other ports of the Empire are more or less of equal attraction. Still it is to be noted that Trebizond and its rulers are mentioned in quite a number of different documents drafted in Venice, Genoa or other places of Romania, not to speak of official deliberations and juridical decisions and petitions. They give us a possibility to know realities of everyday life (and even kinds of local wines and nuts), not to speak of political controversies.

Sometimes in the official decisions we find unexpected details. One example is a reference to the official banner of the emperor of Trebizond raised over the Venetian castle in 1372. Alexios III (1349-1390) demanded to raise his flag over the Venetian castle in Trebizond. The *bailo* hesitated and brought the case to the supreme authorities of Venice. The Senate of Venice decided to adhere to the

existing custom and not to aggravate relations with the sovereign¹⁵. Surely the documents refer to the flag of the state equal to St Marc's standard of Venice, not a battle banner (flamoulon). We have some images of the banner of the Empire of Trebizond in Greek and Western sources. For example, on a miniature of Alexander Romance in the Hellenic Institute of Venice (first half of the XIVth century, of Pontian origin)¹⁶ we detect a red flag over Trebizond with golden horizontal stripes¹⁷. Other images in the Western manuscripts show red flags with a single-headed or double-headed eagle. This emblem was interchangeable¹⁸.

Another small discovery is the revelation of a vivid group of Venetian, Genoese and Florentine nobles serving as high officials, ambassadors or courtiers of the Grand Comnenoi¹⁹.

A bold project of a marriage alliance of a Grand Comnenos, possibly John's IV son, with a daughter of the Genoese doge Ludovico Campofregoso and a story of the Italian voyage of the high ranking Trebizond emissary George Amirutzes had been revealed in the documents of the State Archives of Genoa. Amirutzes is known as a great scholar and the last prime minister of the Empire. Now we meet him as an able diplomat, solving a sharp conflict of his sovereign with Genoa²⁰.

Another embassy from Trebizond and Georgia, inspired by the adventurous "patriarch of Antiochia" Lodovico da Bologna, visited Europe in 1460-61, just before the fall of the Empire. We know the

¹⁵ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), Senato, Misti, XXXIV, f. 17v (F. Thiriet, *Régestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Romanie*, Paris - La Haye, 1958, t.1, N 510)—5/VII 1372: «Super facto autem quod petit dominus imperator videlicet quod ensegniam suam eleventur cum nostris ensegniis sancti Marci volumus quod in hoc fiat secundum quod solitum est servari annis elapsis et de hoc se excuset baiulus noster domini imperatori se exinde fuerit requisitus».

¹⁶ Cf. edition and commentaries: N.S. Trahoulias, *The Greek Alexander Romance, Venice Hellenic Institute Codex Gr.5*, Athens, 1997.

¹⁷ A. Babuin, Standards and Insignia of Byzantium, *Byzantion* 71/1, 2001, p.34.

¹⁸ Cf. S.P.Karpov, K voprosu o gosudarstvennoi simvolike v pozdnevizantijskom mire: gerb i flag Trapezundskoi imperii, in: *Vspomogatel'nye Istoricheskie Diszipliny*, St. Petersburg, 2008, t. 30, pp. 228-231.

¹⁹ S.P.Karpov, Una famiglia nobile del mondo coloniale Genovese: i Di Negro, mercanti e "baroni" dei Grandi Comneni di Trebisonda, in: *Oriente e Occidente tra Medioevo ed età moderna. Studi in onore di Geo Pistarino*, a cura di L.Balletto, Acqui Terme 1997, t.2, pp. 587-604; idem, Italyanskie „barony” trapezundskikh imperatorov, *Viz. Vremennik*, 56(81) 1996. pp.144-155.

²⁰ Cf.: S.P.Karpov, *Istoriya Trapezundskoi imperii*, pp. 300-302.

story²¹. But recently I came across some additional documentary proofs of their sojourn in Venice and of their subsidies received there in November 1460²².

Italian archival documents provide evidence of the fact of intense trade activities of the merchants of the Empire of Trebizond in the area of the Black Sea, and even sometimes far beyond it. They were obviously minor partners of the great Venetian or Genoese dealers, but they maintained an infrastructure of internal trade in the area and, in periods of big crises or wars between Venice and Genoa, between Italians and the Golden Horde, they assumed an important function of maintaining trade relations at major axes of international commerce, North and South of the Black Sea, mainly between Tana and Italian settlements in the Pontos²³. But it is interesting that among Pontian merchants we do not trace *archontes* or landlords, as it was the case in Byzantium, especially from the mid 14th to the mid 15th centuries²⁴.

Trade stimulated social mobility of population, caused Greek emigration to Venice and to Latin Romania, especially in unfavorable situations. Quite recently I revealed interesting evidence in a document of 1432 located in the fund of *Giudici di Petizion* in the State Archives of Venice. A family of three Greeks, the father, a priest, Constantine of Trebizond, and his two sons, George and Michael,

²¹ P.Evangelisti, *Politica e credibilità personale. Un diplomatico francescano tra Tabriz e la Borgogna (1450 circa - 1479)*, *Quaderni storici*, anno XL, N 1, 2005, pp. 3-40; S.P.Karpov, *Istoriya Trapezundskoi imperii*, pp. 333-338.

²² ASV, *Officiali alle rason vecchie*, Notatorio, 25 (2), f. 57v-58r, 91r.

²³ Cf.: A.Laiou, *Byzantium and the Black Sea, 13th-15th Centuries: Trade and the Native populations of the Black Sea Area*, in: *Bulgaria Pontica*, II. Sofia, 1988, pp.164-201; S.P. Karpov, *Italian Trade in the Black Sea Area in the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, in: *XVIIIth Int. Congress of Byzantine Studies. Selected Papers: main and communications*, Moscow, 1991, vol. I: History. Shepherdstown 1996, pp. 303-309; idem, *Trapezundskoe kupechestvo v chernomorskoj trgovle konza XIII - pervoi poloviny XV v.*, in: *Byzantino=Bulgarica*, Sofia, 1981, t. 7, pp. 239-245; idem, *Italyanskije morskije respubliki i Juzhnoe Prichernomorje v XIII - XV vv.: problemy trgovli*, Moscow, 1990.

²⁴ Cf.: K.-P.Matschke, *Das spätbyzantinische Konstantinopel. Alte und neue Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte zwischen 1261 und 1453*, Hamburg, 2008; K.-P. Matschke, F.Tinnefeld, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz. Gruppen, Strukturen und Lebensformen*, Köln; Weimar; Wien, 2001, pp.158-220; K.-P.Matschke, *Byzantinische Politiker und byzantinische Kaufleute im Ringen um die Beteiligung am Schwarzmeerhandel in der Mitte des 14. Jh.*, in: *Mitteilungen des Bulgarischen Forschungsinstitutes in Österreich*. N 2/ VI. 1984, pp. 75-96.

transferred to the Venetian dominated Crete. They lived there for quite a time and obtained local citizenship, claiming themselves *cives originales et habitatores* of Candia. In 1430 some business brought them to Constantinople and there, affected by a sudden disease, they all took the vows in an orthodox monastery. After a couple of years they began asking the duke of Candia and the Venetian authorities to restore their former privileges of citizenship and to grant them a permission to come back to Crete. After all necessary consultations and with the duke's permission, Venetian highest authorities granted them such an authorization²⁵. This rare document is an evidence (not a single one) of high social mobility of the Pontians, of their dissatisfaction of life in the Byzantine capital and their preference to remain during the period of troubles under Venetian protection, notwithstanding all possible limitations.

In some sources, of West-European and also of oriental origin, we come across information about a short-term seizure of Trebizond by a sudden attack of the khan Uzun Hasan's army and of its several military assaults in the Pontos. In reality two campaigns of Uzun Hasan in the direction of Trebizond can be confirmed: in 1463 and in 1472²⁶. We revealed in the State Archives of Venice a letter of the consul of the Republic of St Mark in Thessaloniki. It dates from the 21 of August. Although the year is not mentioned, the description of the events in Bosnia and in the Balkans allows attributing it to 1463. The message was sent via Negroponte (Euboea) where it was received without delay on the 26th of August and sent further to Venice. The consul, whose name is not mentioned, collected political information following the instructions of the *Signoria*. He was acting at the very beginning of the Venetian-Turkish long war declared by Venice on July 28, 1463. According to him, Trebizond was attacked and captured for some time by Uzun Hasan, and the emperor's execution was the sultan's respond to it. Therefore all that occurred earlier than the mid of August 1463.²⁷ Meanwhile previously we considered that

²⁵ ASV, Cassiere della bolla ducale. Grazie, 23, f.32r.

²⁶ *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken*, hrsg. von F. Giese, 2, Leipzig, 1925, pp. 151; Evliya Celebi, *Kniga Puteshestviya*, T. 3, Moscow, 1983, pp. 31, 87; F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, Princeton, 1992, pp. 314-316; J.E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu Clan, Confederation Empire. A Study in 15th/9th Century Turk-Iranian Politics*, Minneapolis; Chicago, 1976, pp. 127-134.

²⁷ ASV, Procuratori di San Marco, Procuratorie Miste, 85, busta 3, fasc. VI. S.P.Karpov, Was Trebizond really captured by Uzun Hasan after 1461 New archival evidences, in: *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65.*

event took place in November 1, 6972 (1463) at night²⁸. There were only suppositions that the execution was caused by the correspondence of the exiled Grand Comnenoi with the worst enemy of the sultan and David's brother in law Uzun Hasan. Now we can assume that not only cognate links by themselves and not only the messages, handed over to Mehmed II by Amirutzes, as stated by late Byzantine chronicles, but also a direct assault of Trebizond by Ak-Quyunlu caused the anger of the sultan and the execution of the whole family in 1463.

Last, not least, I must mention specially a great fund of the court for Petitions in the State Archives of Venice. It dealt mostly with the commercial contentious cases. There is a lot of information on trade in all the areas of the Latin Romania, Trebizond amid them. I will cite, just as an example, one case brought for trial by a high-ranking Venetian noble Domenico Morosini against his old partner Filippo Marcello. The last one performed a long voyage with the merchant galleys from Venice to Constantinople and Trebizond in 1441 and sold there Florentine silk cloth, buying, in exchange some merchandise and making investments in raw silk in Trebizond. Morosini did not accept the deal as reasonable. But the court ascertained Filippo's rightness and his faculty to act like that according to the agreement previously settled by the partners. What is relevant, Trebizond remained at that time an important center of international exchange of raw materials (like silk from Talish, Armenia) against spices and silver, while Florentine silk cloth was sold previously not there, but in Constantinople with a presumption that it was more levelheaded to carry precious metal, not precious textiles, to the Pontos. Investments of this single case consisted of

Geburtstag, hrsg. K.Belke, E. Kislinger, A. Külzer, M. A. Stassinopoulou, Wien; Köln; Weimar 2007, pp. 295-301. The document was also published together with some others, but without a historical interpretation of the event: Oliver Jens Schmitt, Griechen, Albaner, Tzakonen, Bulgaren: venezianische Briefschaften aus der Morea (1463/64), *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas*, 2, 2000, pp. 161-189.

²⁸ J.E. Powell, Die letzten Tage der Grosskomnenen, *BZ* 37, 1937, pp. 359-360; E. Gamillscheg, Der Kopist des Par. gr. 428 und das Ende der Großkomnenen, *JÖB*, 36, 1986, pp. 298-299, Anm.13. Gamillscheg assumes that this note could belong to the hand of Amirutzes, an eye-witness and a participant of the events (296). Still the accusations of the Kabasitai and condemnation of the Islamisation hardly correspond to the Turkophile orientation of Amirutzes at that time.

hundreds of ducats and a probable loss of a predictable (but not realized) profit equaled to 600 ducats²⁹.

There are many other “archival” things to mention, for example, some letters of the Venetian Signoria sent to her *bailos* in Trebizond. A special discourse is a long and extremely well documented story of the voyages of Venetian merchant galleys down to Trebizond. I tried to gather that information in my last publications³⁰.

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²⁹ ASV, GP, Sentenze, 88, f.42v-43v – 28/II 1442.

³⁰ For example: S.P Karpov, *La Navigazione Veneziana nel Mar Nero, XIII-XV sec.*, Ravenna, 2000.

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